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Chairman:	Mr. von WAGNER	(Germany)
later:	Mr. PONCE (Vice-Chairman)	(Ecuador)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 76: QUESTION OF ANTARCTICA (A/48/449 and A/48/482)

1. The CHAIRMAN explained how the Committee would approach the question of Antarctica and announced that the Department of Public Information (DPI) had just issued a publication on that topic entitled "Protecting the common heritage of Antarctica".

2. Mr. ISMAIL (Malaysia) said that the non-aligned countries favoured the continued evolution of the Antarctic Treaty system. Not only did the Treaty protect Antarctica, whose influence on the world climate was decisive, it could also be seen as a confidence-building measure to promote peace and security in that important part of the world. The issue was one of particular concern to the international community, and the United Nations remained the most appropriate forum for its consideration. The adoption of the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty and the successful outcome of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development demonstrated the international community's determination to undertake the necessary measures to tackle the environmental problems of Antarctica. His delegation hoped that the Committee would endeavour to involve the entire international community, under the auspices of the United Nations, in efforts to consider and decide on the future of Antarctica.

3. Following intense negotiations during the preparatory process, agreement had been reached at the Earth Summit in Rio on chapter 17 of Agenda 21, which was consistent with article III of the Antarctic Treaty. The provisions of chapter 17 on scientific research activities conducted in Antarctica represented a compromise. His delegation nevertheless welcomed the agreement reached, which recognized the value of Antarctica as an area for the conduct of scientific research essential to an understanding of the global environment. That recognition was of great importance in view of the fragility of the Antarctic ecosystem. Only the United Nations had the capability to collect and distribute scientific information to Member States, research bodies and non-governmental organizations effectively. The States Parties to the Antarctic Treaty should, on the basis of the agreement reached in Rio, hold an annual symposium on the question of safeguarding Antarctica and its importance for the global environment.

4. The Commission on Sustainable Development would consider chapter 17 of Agenda 21 in 1996. The relevant preparatory work should be concluded well before that date, underscoring the direct linkage between the United Nations and members of the Antarctic Treaty consultative process. His delegation was disappointed that those parties did not fully appreciate the important role played by the Secretary-General in that area and regretted that he had not been invited to attend the recent Seventeenth Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting; on a more positive note, he welcomed the fact that specialized agencies and United Nations programmes such as the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) had been invited. It was evident from the report of the Secretary-General on the question of Antarctica (A/48/482) that the Secretary-General and the wider

(Mr. Ismail, Malaysia)

international community could have made important contributions to that work. He hoped that the consultative parties would seriously consider inviting the Secretary-General or his representative to participate in their next meeting. Only in that way could consensus be reached on that important issue. At the same time, his delegation welcomed the positive initiative taken by the consultative parties in transmitting the report of the Seventeenth Consultative Meeting to the Secretary-General. The report noted that consensus had been reached on the establishment of a secretariat to assist with their meetings and those of the Committee for Environmental Protection. Such a secretariat would be useful not only in monitoring activities but also in maintaining direct linkages with the rest of the international community through the United Nations.

5. The international community must shoulder the main responsibility for safeguarding the environment of the Antarctic, and the growth of tourism in that region was therefore a source of concern. It was crucial that the United Nations should be seen as spearheading the promotion of public awareness on matters relating to Antarctica. DPI had an important role in that undertaking. His delegation noted with appreciation the report of the Secretary-General on the state of the environment in Antarctica (A/48/449) and regretted that, owing to the Organization's financial situation, it would not be possible in the immediate future to publish various scientific reports on the protection of the Antarctic environment. He hoped that extracts from those documents could be published. The Secretary-General's report was confined to technical activities and omitted any reference to the serious implications of environmental degradation and the possible increase in tourism. It also failed to consider the advantages and disadvantages of making Antarctica part of the global commons. It was vital for the international community to give its attention to the future of that last pristine frontier of the planet, which had a direct bearing on the security and survival of mankind.

6. Mr. FULCI (Italy), speaking on behalf of the States parties to the Antarctic Treaty, said that the Treaty was designed to ensure that Antarctica could continue to be used for the benefit of all mankind, for peaceful purposes, and that it would never become the object of international discord. The number of States parties to the Treaty had continued to grow, and its 42 current parties represented 70 per cent of the world's population. In 1991, the parties had adopted the Protocol on Environmental Protection, which designated Antarctica as a natural reserve devoted to peace and science. Some 36 States parties to the Antarctic Treaty, including all the consultative parties, had signed the Protocol and committed themselves to taking the necessary steps for its earliest possible entry into force.

7. Aware of the importance of Antarctica for the global environment, the States parties to the Antarctic Treaty had provided detailed information during the preparatory process for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. Their constructive influence had led to the adoption, after much hard work, of paragraph 17.104 of Agenda 21.

(Mr. Fulci, Italy)

8. The Seventeenth Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting had highlighted the high degree of cooperation among the States parties. In particular, the consultative parties had reached an understanding on the desirability of establishing a secretariat for the Antarctic Treaty and on a preliminary text concerning its functions, composition, financing and legal status. Progress had also been made towards establishing the Committee for Environmental Protection envisaged under article 11 of the Protocol on Environmental Protection with the preparation of draft rules of procedure. Finally, it had been agreed to convene a meeting of legal experts to draft rules and procedures on liability for damage arising from activities in the Antarctic Treaty area which were covered by the Protocol.

9. Another important contribution towards the provision of information called for in Agenda 21 had been made by the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR), which had recently prepared a report on the role of the Antarctic in climate change; copies of the report, which contained valuable information on global processes, had been transmitted to the Secretary-General. SCAR would keep the United Nations informed of further developments in that area through its newsletter and other publications.

10. The Secretary-General's report (A/48/482) demonstrated that the Antarctic Treaty was a modern and dynamic system which continued to offer timely and comprehensive solutions to all the questions facing Antarctica. He hoped that the consensus reached at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development would serve as a model for understanding in the General Assembly so that in the future the Assembly might not have to vote on unhelpful and divisive resolutions. He invited all States which had not yet done so to accede to the Antarctic Treaty in order to safeguard the future of that continent, develop scientific activities there and take advantage of the experience already acquired by the States parties to the Treaty.

11. Mr. Ponce (Ecuador), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

12. Mr. HURST (Antigua and Barbuda) said that, as borne out by the various scientific reports, Antarctica played a crucial and unique role in global climate changes. The main interaction in the region between the atmosphere, ice, oceans and biota affected the entire global system through feedback, biogeochemical cycles, deep-sea circulation, atmospheric transport of energy and pollutants, and changes in ice mass balances. The formation of a hole of unprecedented proportions in the ozone layer over Antarctica and the "greenhouse effect", which could cause sea ice and the icecap to melt resulting in rising sea levels, were all phenomena that could have particularly grave consequences for coastal States and low-lying island States.

13. It was recognized that the ozone depletion over Antarctica followed an annual pattern and was an artificial phenomenon. Apart from the impact of human activity on the Antarctic itself, radioactive isotopes from nuclear testing had also been discovered. In that connection, he considered that the recommendations of the Seventeenth Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting needed to be strengthened and made mandatory. Governments should request the members

(Mr. Hurst, Antigua and Barbuda)

of the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR) to consider and provide advice on the types of long-term programmes, if any, needed to verify that human activities (such as tourism, scientific research or other activities) did not have significant adverse effects on birds, seals and plants. Emission standards should also be adopted so as to ensure that the combustion of fossil fuels and incineration of waste would not contaminate the atmosphere, the terrestrial or marine environments or ice in a way that would compromise their scientific value.

14. With regard to the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty, he welcomed the ban on the prospecting and extraction of mineral and petroleum resources in Antarctica for the coming 50 years. However, he noted that the Protocol would not ensure protection of the fragile environment of Antarctica, since it did not envisage a meaningful role for the United Nations or its competent organs, such as UNEP; nor did the Protocol comply with the request for openness by which States were not party to the Treaty. The United Nations would be the most appropriate mechanism for that task. Furthermore, while he noted with satisfaction the decision of States parties to submit to the Secretary-General the final report of the Seventeenth Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting, he regretted their decision to ignore the General Assembly resolutions requesting an invitation to that Conference for the Secretary-General or his representative. None the less, the steps taken to prohibit fishing in certain areas and limit catches in others were worthy of praise, although the risk of certain exploratory operations degenerating into commercial activities should not be overlooked.

15. He stressed that his country had consistently called for the protection and conservation of the Antarctic environment and its dependent and associated ecosystems; it considered that the time had come to establish a nature reserve or world park, so that it would remain a zone of peace, free of nuclear and other weapons and all military activities.

16. Mr. DANKWA (Ghana) stressed, particularly for the benefit of the Consultative Parties to the Atlantic Treaty, that the international community was not seeking to hinder efforts to gain a better understanding of the continent. It was worthwhile recalling that the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held in Rio de Janeiro, had expressed the will of the international community - including the Consultative Parties - to take collective action so as to arrest environmental degradation, while promoting economic development.

17. He welcomed the fact that the Consultative Parties had invited some of the United Nations specialized agencies to participate at their seventeenth meeting in Venice, and had submitted the corresponding report to the Secretary-General of the United Nations. Without questioning the validity of the statement by the meeting to the effect that inspections carried out had shown the transparency of the Antarctic Treaty, he said that transparency, as far as the larger international community was concerned, required the results of such inspections to be made available to the Secretary-General, in accordance with the General Assembly resolutions. Similar arrangements should be made with regard to

(Mr. Dankwa, Ghana)

tourist activities in Antarctica. It was in that spirit that Ghana called upon the Consultative Parties to invite the Secretary-General or his representative to take part in their meetings, with a view to strengthening the links between them and the rest of the international community. Likewise, the Consultative Parties should review their position of limited participation or non-participation in the general debate and decision-making process concerning Antarctica, which lent credence to the perception of secrecy regarding their activities in Antarctica. Such transparency was further justified by the general and legitimate interest in the future of Antarctica - the "centre of the universe", a point of conversion for three major oceans and depositary for 70 per cent of the world's known freshwater reserves and 90 per cent of its ice sheets.

18. His delegation hoped that all those concerned, including the Consultative Parties, would recognize that Antarctica was the cornerstone of all global security concerns, and that the United Nations should remain seized of the question.

19. Mr. JUSUF (Indonesia) said that the Antarctic Treaty system was a unique mechanism for promoting and regulating scientific cooperation, resource conservation and environmental protection. As a result, consensus had emerged on the need to keep the area free from conflicts and protect its fragile ecosystem. At the same time, serious reservations had been expressed regarding the Antarctic Treaty concerning inter alia special rights and privileges conferred on its Consultative Parties, its inherently selective and exclusive nature, as well as matters such as accountability, equity and the relationship between the Antarctic Treaty regime and the United Nations system. None the less, it was true that the principal signatories had sought to dispel those misgivings by providing information on certain aspects of functioning of the regime and by granting observer status to some of the specialized agencies and international scientific organizations. Moreover, the non-consultative parties had been more actively involved in the meetings of the Consultative Parties and the reports of those meetings had been made available to the Secretary-General.

20. Referring to the report of the Seventeenth Meeting of the Consultative Parties, he drew attention to man's interference in a very complex natural system, which could trigger unforeseen consequences. He also expressed concern regarding the criteria applied in respect of accession to the Treaty and the privileges granted or denied to non-consultative parties. He could also not fail to mention that the Consultative Parties had decided to establish a secretariat to supervise the functioning and implementation of the Treaty and that they were still reluctant to involve the States parties in their work within the framework of the only universal forum - the United Nations - although the international community was entitled to be kept well-informed on all aspects of the question of Antarctica.

(Mr. Jusuf, Indonesia)

21. His delegation therefore urged that the principle of international cooperation should be applied as broadly as possible with respect to the activities of the parties, and that the developing countries should be given greater access to Antarctica. His delegation was guided in the matter by the provisions of the Charter and by an interest in harmonizing international action for the benefit of all mankind.

22. Mr. BASNET (Nepal) said that unlike some delegations, his delegation thought that a decade of examination of the question of Antarctica in the General Assembly had not been in vain. Not only was the long-sought consensus finally in sight, but, in addition, the debate had served to heighten international awareness about the tremendous importance of Antarctica in the global ecosystem, about its fragility and the need to protect the earth's climate from dramatic and unpredictable changes resulting from pollution and environmental impact which human activity might trigger. His delegation therefore welcomed the Secretary-General's report on the state of the environment in Antarctica (A/48/449) and the input of the various international, intergovernmental and scientific bodies to the report. It had been Nepal's consistent view that the problem of changes triggered by human activities in the Antarctic needed to be addressed through a universal regime based on a cooperative relationship with the United Nations. Measures limited to the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties (ATCPs) could not fully address problems of global concern. His delegation appreciated the adoption by the parties to ensure adoption of the Madrid Protocol on Environmental Protection, and was pleased that they had responded positively to the concern over the prospect of opening the continent to mining. It was likewise encouraging that the Consultative Parties were increasingly involving the international community in their work. In particular, he welcomed the invitation to some specialized agencies to participate in the Seventeenth Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting and the fact that the report of the meeting had been transmitted to the Secretary-General.

23. The Antarctic Treaty was a major disarmament instrument designed to ensure that the Antarctic continent would forever be used exclusively for peaceful purposes, and to promote international cooperation on a permanent basis with all territorial claims set aside and all military or nuclear activities prohibited. The Antarctic Treaty system represented a network of measures to promote scientific research, conserve and protect biological diversity and preserve the regulating properties of the biosphere. The active participation of the United Nations would be most desirable in order to ensure that all activities in Antarctica, the common heritage of mankind, were being conducted in the best interests of mankind. It was with that conviction that his delegation had co-sponsored the draft resolution submitted by the delegation of Malaysia.

24. Mr. MONGBE (Benin) deprecated a certain trend towards rhetoric and recalled that for disarmament measures to be effective, they should be neither imposed nor extorted. Only by demonstrating political realism could progress in the cause of universal security be achieved. The time of rivalry between power blocs, now a thing of the past, had, with reference to Antarctica, been marked by the 1959 Washington Treaty which had permitted the demilitarization and

(Mr. Mongbe, Benin)

denuclearization of that continent. However, continued efforts must be made to prevent Antarctica, the common heritage of mankind, from becoming the stake in or theatre of a conflict which might jeopardize international peace and security. Common efforts should also be designed to safeguard and protect that continent whose ecosystem was fragile and whose impact on global climate was of foremost importance.

25. Non-military threats represented by human pressures on Antarctica's environment were a cause for concern. Activities such as tourism, fisheries, use of mineral resources, etc., not to mention fallout from nuclear tests, had depleted the ozone layer, altered the ecological balance and spread pollution.

26. Aware of those dangers, the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties had adopted the 1991 Madrid Protocol which established the fundamental principles for protecting the environment of Antarctica so as to make it a nature reserve devoted to peace and scientific research. That the Protocol prohibited prospecting and mining of mineral resources in Antarctica and the surrounding seas for the next 50 years was, of course, encouraging, but the ban should become permanent. Moreover, no follow-up mechanism to ensure respect for its provisions had been set into place, and some parties seemed in no particular hurry to ratify it. In the interests of international peace and security and of all mankind, it was time for all activities affecting Antarctica to be conducted under the high authority of the Secretary-General of the United Nations within the system of international cooperation, in accordance with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the commitment expressed in Agenda 21 of the Rio Conference on Environment and Development. It was regrettable that the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties had never invited the Secretary-General to their meetings, because that would enable the international community to play a part in drafting the convention designed to turn Antarctica into a nature reserve or a world park. In the meantime, the Secretary-General should receive all necessary support for the publication by the Department of Public Information of materials which would allow the general public to become more aware of the importance of Antarctica for the ecosystem of planet Earth.

27. In conclusion, he said that his delegation, which had always opposed the participation of the Government of the racist regime in South Africa in the work of the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties, welcomed the irreversible movement towards a just and lasting solution to the situation in that country, and he invited the Consultative Parties to demonstrate their commitment and solidarity by supporting the adoption of the resolution on the question of Antarctica.

28. Mrs. KATABARWA (Uganda) said that the international community was indebted to those countries which through scientific research had raised awareness of the central role of Antarctica in the environmental well-being of the planet. She welcomed the fact that according to the Secretary-General's report (A/48/482), information provided by the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties had shown continuing progress in the field of international cooperation directed towards better understanding of that remote continent and a marked trend, as concerned the Antarctic Treaty, towards greater interest in increased action in relation to its environmental aspects. It seemed that more needed to be done with

(Mrs. Katabarwa, Uganda)

respect to tourism, and she expressed the hope that an additional legally binding instrument would find acceptance among the parties to the Protocol on Environmental Protection, since that would ensure still greater protection for that fragile continent against human activity.

29. Her delegation applauded the efforts of the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties aimed at protecting and preserving that continent and its ecosystems for peaceful purposes and promoting international scientific cooperation. It was encouraging that some specialized agencies had been invited to participate in the Seventeenth Meeting, but regrettable that the Secretary-General or his representative had not been invited even once, since the United Nations was the only organization embodying the interests of those not parties to the Treaty. Her Government looked to the United Nations to provide the general public with information to promote better awareness of Antarctica, which had been described as the centre of the universe, and of its influence on global environment, and to remain seized of that important question.

The meeting rose at 4.50 p.m.